

William Vincent Lucas

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THIRD SERIES

Eminent Iowan Series

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WILLIAM VINCENT LUCAS

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By ERNEST PORTER

Elevation to official position in American life has never been limited to a select few. A citizen in any strata of professional, business or private activity here may aspire to and hold a political office, either elective or appointive.

Not always are they qualified, of course, or even adapted to rendering a high standard of service, but those who are successful in obtaining preferment usually do possess some individual ability or quality that recommends them.

When opportunity is afforded, and a citizen of a county or state demonstrates a competence in rendering satisfactory or superior service in one public position, oftentimes he advances to other positions of trust and responsibility, thereby becoming more important as a public figure, possibly reaching eminence in official life.

*Ernest Porter is upon the legal staff of the Denver & Rio Grande Railway Company and now resides at Denver, Colo. He served as commerce counsel of the Iowa Commerce Commission for a number of years and previously as assistant curator of the Iowa Department of History at Des Moines. A recent inspection of the Spirit Lake Massacre monument at Arnold's Park on Lake Okoboji, by a member of the ANNALS staff, discloses the name of W. V. Lucas still upon the monument memorial despite the desire of both himself and Curator Charles Aldrich to have it removed.

From an individual standpoint, once acquiring a taste for performing administrative tasks and thus succumbing to the lure of public service—and it does have an attractiveness for those having contact with official affairs—there is a tendency to remain in the ranks of officeholders, or to return to public station in some capacity.

Whether this character of work long indulged in really unfits an individual for private pursuits in life may be an open question. Men are not actually dedicated for life to public service in this country, like the custom obtains in England, but here some do continue indefinitely in some capacities.

Although more versatile perhaps, than eminent, such a man William Vincent Lucas seems to have been. As a farmer in Bremer county he first was a township trustee and then a county officer; volunteered as a private in the Civil War, elected lieutenant of his company, and later promoted to a captaincy, serving until his regiment was mustered out in 1864. Returning to Bremer county he was elected county treasurer three times. Lucas was a Republican and they were somewhat divided upon local issues. The Democrat county convention did not nominate a ticket. Dissatisfied Republicans held a convention and nominated a "Soldier's Ticket," endorsing all the Republican nominees with exception of those for State representative, county treasurer and surveyor. Lucas was named for treasurer and elected.

AN ABLE NEWSPAPER EDITOR

In 1872, Mr. Lucas acquired and edited the *Waverly Independent*, but later sold it and purchased the *Waverly Republican*, which he edited with vigor. He removed to Mason City becoming editor of the *Republican*. Wheeler's History of Cerro Gordo county says of him: "Capt. W. V. Lucas was one of the ablest newspaper writers who ever engaged in journalistic work in Cerro Gordo county. He was not only an able writer, but in some respects the most effective speaker who has made

their home in this county. As a writer and speaker he was able, versatile and convincing."

STATE AUDITOR OF IOWA

While in Mason City he served as mayor, and in 1878 was elected chief clerk of the Iowa House of Representatives, and again in 1880; became a candidate for auditor of the state of Iowa in the fall of 1880 and was elected, serving with force and competency one term from 1881 to 1883, but declined to be a candidate for re-election.

In 1883, Lucas moved to South Dakota, locating near Chamberlain and engaged in farming. Being of the aggressive type, his acquaintance quickly was extended and in 1887 he was elected treasurer of Brule county. While serving in that capacity, he was appointed on the board having charge of the building of the new Soldiers' Home at Hot Springs, and upon its completion became its first commandant. In 1902, without being a candidate, he was nominated by the Republicans for congressman from that district and was elected, and served in the Fifty-third congress, but was defeated for re-election by the Fusionists. Then he was re-called to Hot Springs as commandant of the Soldiers' Home, where he remained until 1903, when because of failing health he resigned and removed to Santa Cruz, California, where he died November 11, 1921.

DECLINED HIS UNDESERVED HONOR

A noteworthy episode in the life of Lucas that clearly indicated the upright and positive character of the man, also had historical significance. It was when his name was included among the rescuers honored in placing the monument at the scene of the Spirit Lake massacre, which he demanded be removed, not being a member of the relief companies either from Fort Dodge or Webster City.

The accuracy of inscriptions upon public monuments and gravestones is seldom a matter of dispute. Those entrusted with responsibility for deciding upon names, dates and other information to be so preserved,

can usually be relied upon. Those whose deeds and accomplishments are thus recited seldom if ever disclaim the heroic actions or noble traits ascribed to them.

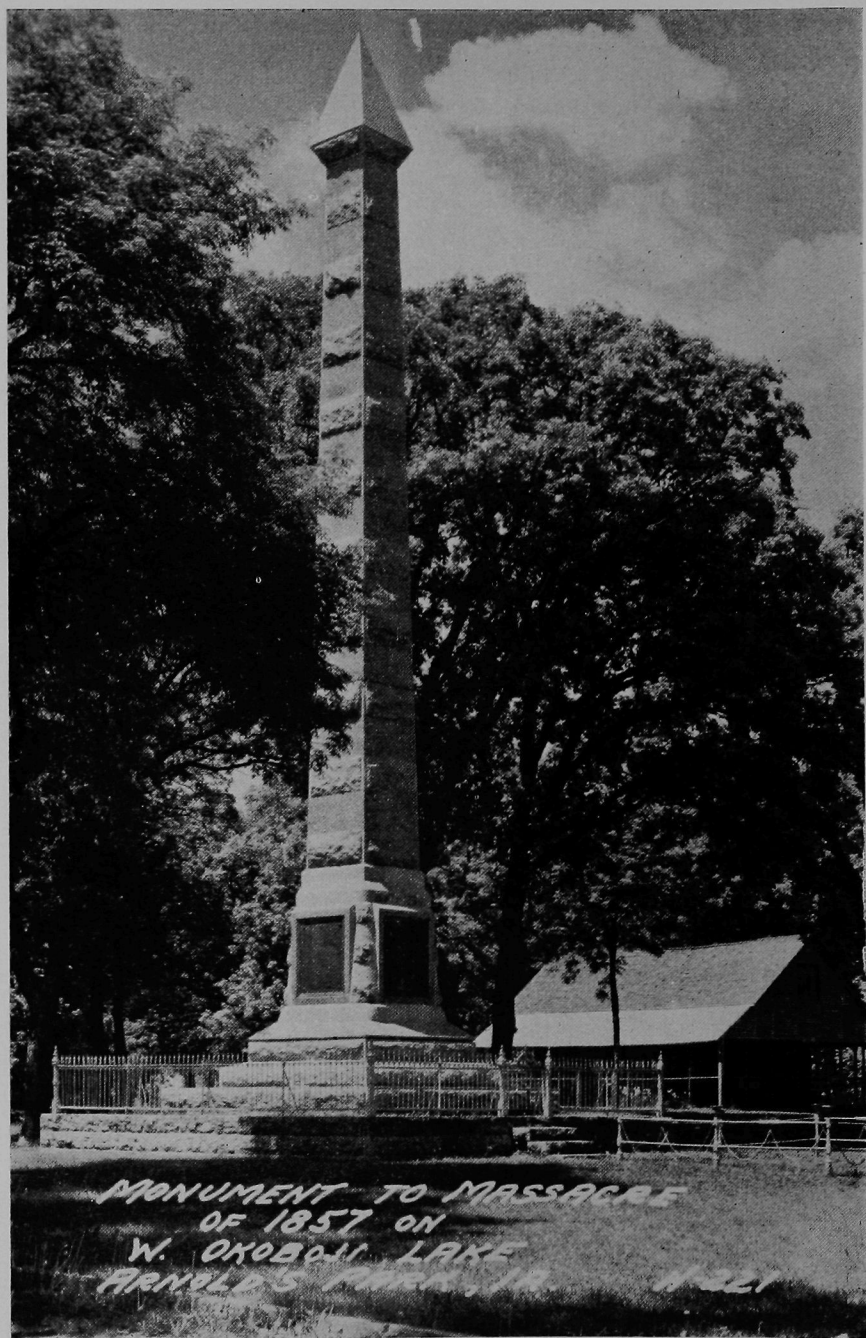
An almost universal rule in human conduct might be well expressed as "Get all you can while the gettin's good." Now, this principle, or lack of principle, is applicable to money, food and other material comforts and luxuries as well as to honor, glory and social position, things more aesthetic, yet nearly as essential to our happiness. This creed is not one of our day alone, but dates back to Adam and the primeval forests. It has had its champions in every generation since the beginning.

Occasionally, some Gallahad stands out as an opponent to this principle, much to his own chagrin generally, for such a man is so unusual that his fellows think him "cracked," or a "little touched," or perhaps just downright crazy. He ends life generally without the accomplishments of the average citizen and often earlier in life than his less worthy associates, and with the respect of a lesser number than a thorough crook living under the guise of an honest, hustling, red-blooded American businessman.

Here is a glowing example of this type of person in Iowa history. It is relatively inconspicuous, but serves to prove that there was an honest man and that there has lived someone interested in the deeds of honesty rather than unearned credit for deeds not performed.

Almost a century ago, in the early part of the month of March 1857, the horrible Spirit Lake Massacre was committed by a band of Sioux Indians under the leadership of Inkpahdulah. But one of the noblest expeditions in Iowa history was that of the rescuers of the survivors of that tragedy, outlined in able articles written years ago and published in the ANNALS.

Among the honored ones named on the monument at the time of its erection to the memory of survivors and their rescuers, as well as to those who had fallen under the knife of Inkpahdulah's band, was W. V. Lucas,



credited with being one of the rescuers. But, Mr. Lucas promptly disclaimed any connection with the rescue party and became indignant that the state should force upon him such an undeserved honor and give him public recognition and credit for deeds not performed by him. Although he reached Spirit Lake later, it was after the rescue troops had left.

He protested most vigorously to Charles Aldrich, the chairman of the committee that prepared the wording of the inscriptions appearing on the monument. Mr. Aldrich in a public statement emphatically disclaimed any responsibility for the inclusion of the name of Mr. Lucas, stating that the copy for the inscriptions did not contain same when it left his hands, that it had been interpolated therein by others. He recited the subsequent proceedings by those whom he deemed responsible, naming in particular Abbie Gardner Sharp, as well as urged the effacing of the name, which was not done.

LUCAS LETTERS TO ALDRICH

The Aldrich statement with signed letters to him from both Mr. Lucas and Mrs. Sharp, having historical significance, are in the files of the Iowa State Department of History and Archives, and are appended. They are interesting, showing details of this episode in the placing of the markers commemorating the early tragedy at the Iowa lakes almost a century ago.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

United States Land Office

Chamberlain, South Dakota, Sept. 21st, 1898

Hon. Charles Aldrich, Des Moines, Iowa.

My Dear Sir: On my return home I found your letter. In answer will say I was not a member of Co. "C" or any other Co. that was organized and went to the rescue of the settlers at Spirit Lake in 1857. The How family who were in the massacre were relatives of our family and as soon as we heard of the raid, my brother, self and two cousins with John Bryland, Henry Foster and Louis Lane started for Spirit Lake, expecting to meet rescuers from Fort Dodge and other parts. But we did not reach the Lake until in April, about the 6th I think,—all organized troops or Co's were gone; we saw none.

I do not know how it comes I am reckoned a member of Co. "C". I have often talked with Abbie Gardner Sharp, for I have known her since her rescue and her family and my father's family have been friends and acquaintances for more than 75 years. It is likely Abbie in her zeal and deep interest in all that pertains to that tragical event may have caused the engraving, but of this I have no knowledge, not having seen or heard from her directly, since she was in Washington in 1893 or 4.

I had been in the state about a year when the massacre occurred, stopping in Linn Co. from where we went, afterwards coming to Bremer Co. in May 1857. The foregoing is as I recollect the events. My cousins—Binney & Dimmitt—are both dead. My brother and Bryland were killed in the Civil war. Lane and Foster I have not heard from since the war and don't know whether living or not. So, as nearly as can tell, I am the last one left of the seven. We almost perished in the storms and snow, that I will never forget.

Hope you are well, as I am. I go to Iowa tomorrow to visit my only daughter at Garner. Fine crops in this state and prosperity is upon us.

Yours truly, W. V. LUCAS

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

United States Land Office

Chamberlain, South Dakota, October 6th, 1898

Hon. Charles Aldrich, Des Moines, Iowa.

On my return from a brief visit with my father, who is 85, at Clarksville, Iowa, I find your letter. As I told you in a former letter I was not a member of Co "C" or any organized Co. in the "Spirit Lake war;" nor did we get there in time to see any of those troops; nor did I have anything directly or remotely to do with putting my name among those who were in the Co's.

I assisted Mrs. Sharp in 1879 & 1880 in starting in her work of preserving the grounds. In about 1881 John T. Stoneman, Ben Van Steenberg of Jackson Co., A. T. McCarger and myself while at Okoboji Lake formed, as I recollect its name, the Monument Association and each contributed a small amount to start with and deposited it with Ben Van Steenberg, the Banker at Spirit Lake. We drew up a set of rules or by-laws and provided for soliciting a popular fund to build a monument. Senator Stoneman was elected President, McCarger Treas. Van Steenberg (Ben) V-Pres and I Secretary.

McCarger and I were both publishing newspapers at the time; we spent several months trying to stir up an interest in the work. But did not succeed to any extent. Some small contributions were made to the fund, how much I don't

know. It remained in the bank as much as 12 or 13 years. About that time Abbie wrote me asking for the money to be expended by her, I wrote Mr. Stoneman and enclosed what I believed would be a voucher for the bank, which I suppose was accepted and the money paid to Abbie.

In 1883, she came to this place in search of "Bluwing Goose" who was in the massacre and lived at that time at Fort Thompson. I got all arrangements made to take her to the Indian camp, but she was taken sick the day before and was compelled to return without seeing the Indian of whom she hoped to get some information as to the route she was taken over while captive.

I do not think for a moment my name should be on the monument. I would scorn the thought of taking honors or glory I am not entitled to or did not earn. I served my country, and went from Iowa to do it, during the War of the Rebellion and I hope history will say faithfully and honorably.

I regret more than I can express that a mistake of this character and publicity was made. I was astonished when about six months ago I heard of it the first time.

I now request you, Curator and Secretary of the Historical Dept. of Iowa, to take steps to efface my name from the shaft. If a more formal action is required I will at once inaugurate it. But I suppose it needs nothing more than an order from the Governor.

I am as much interested in the correct history of Iowa as any man who lives in it, for I spent 27 of the best years of my life in it. I grew from boyhood to manhood in it, coming into the state first in 1855, and returning east until 1856, when I again came back and remained until 1883. I saw the state grow and develop from a wilderness into a grand and magnificent commonwealth. Indeed, I am not entirely weaned of my love for the state and people yet, and have provided in my will to be laid to rest in its soil when the battle of life is over with me.

Most sincerely yours, W. V. LUCAS

P.—If more is required, be
kind enough to inform me.

A NAME OUT OF PLACE

"In the winter of 1894," said Charles Aldrich, in his statement of April 9, 1903, "the Twenty-fifth General Assembly passed a bill which was approved by the governor, providing \$5,000 for the purpose of erecting a monument at Lake Okoboji to the memory of the people who lost their lives in the Spirit Lake Massacre.

"Shortly after the adjournment of the legislature, Governor Frank D. Jackson appointed a commission of five persons to take charge of the matter of erecting a monument. These commissioners were Ex-Governor Cyrus C. Carpenter, Hon. Messrs. John F. Duncombe and Rodney A. Smith, Mrs. Abbie Gardner Sharp, and myself.

"I was unable to be present at the organization of the Commission, which took place at the Gardner cabin near the West Okoboji Lake. Some days afterwards I received intelligence that I had been appointed a committee of *one* to prepare the inscriptions for the tablets which were to be placed upon the four sides of the die.

"I found this to be a good deal of a job, and it kept me home most of the time during the following very hot summer, when in justice to myself I should have taken an outing to the sea shore or the mountains. I suppose the reason why I was appointed was because I was spending most of my time at the state capital, where records ought to exist and be readily found. But, in the thirty years that had elapsed since the massacre, the members of the expedition had become scattered over many states and the lists of names of the slain settlers were far from correct. Of records proper, there were literally none. This subjected me to a great deal of correspondence, and I felt deep anxiety in having the work absolutely correct.

"At last I finished the task as far as I was able to do, and so informed Mr. Duncombe, who had been very active in all matters pertaining to the monument. He had written me that the copy for the tablets was needed at once, and directed me to send it by mail from Des Moines to St. Paul. This, however, I declined to do, but sent it to him, stating that while I had done all the work in the preparation of the tablets, I was willing only to accept a fifth of the responsibility. I wanted him and Governor Carpenter, who were members of the expedition, to look over the copy which I had prepared for the tablets, and make any

corrections which they deemed proper. And then, I intimated that they could send them, or submit them in some way, to the two other members of the Commission, Hon. R. A. Smith, and Mrs. Sharp, at Okoboji.

"I heard nothing further from him for several weeks, when I understood that the copy had been sent to St. Paul and the tablets duly cast. I did not see the tablets until the day that the monument was dedicated, and even then—never apprehending that any name would be added unless there were records or recollections to fortify that action—I only glanced at them casually, as they were already in place and we were very busy with the matter of the dedication.

"Later on, however, long after the inscription had appeared in the newspapers, and I had even copied them into the *ANNALS*, I discovered that the name of W. V. Lucas had been interpolated into the roster of Co. C, which went from my town of Webster City.

"The first time I saw Mr. Duncombe after that, I called his attention to it. His reply was, that Mrs. Sharp had insisted that the name of Mr. Lucas should appear on the monument. 'Of course,' he said, 'he was not in either of our Fort Dodge companies, and he must have been in yours, so I put his name in the Webster City company.'

"I felt incensed at this imposition, but it was a doubtful question what should be done. The few friends with whom I consulted said that the name ought to be taken off, as indeed it should be.

"Up to the time of this writing, however, nothing has transpired in relation to it. I wrote Mr. Lucas, asking some explanation of the matter, and received two letters from him, which I intend to file in the records of this Department, with this statement of my own. Mr. Lucas's letters will convince any reader that it was not the proper thing to include his name in the roster of Co. C.

"I had several conversations with Mr. Duncombe in relation to the matter, and he agreed with me that something should be done even at that late day to set the

matter right, but I do not recollect that he ever suggested any particular means to accomplish this end. I wrote to him not long before his fatal illness, intending to go to Fort Dodge to see what we could do about it, but his illness resulted in his death, so the matter has rested.

"It was a very difficult task, indeed, to prepare the four inscriptions, owing to the reasons I have stated, and while I may have omitted some name which should justly have been placed upon the monument, I disclaim all responsibility for the appearance of that of Mr. Lucas.

"Having set forth the facts in the case, I leave the matter to the judgment of the impartial reader. In my own opinion the name should be neatly cut out, leaving simply a smooth blank space in its place. This need not disfigure the tablet to any great extent.

"The commissioners each took an oath of office, and while I am not disposed to impugn the integrity of any of my distinguished associates, it seems to me that this was a matter of history, which everybody should have striven to make as correct as possible; that each name and date should be verified; and that no name should have appeared unless it was that of some party who participated in the sad events connected with the Massacre."

SENATOR DUNCOMBE'S POSITION

Without quoting at length the numerous letters from committee member Duncombe referred to by Mr. Aldrich, his position in the matter of names appearing upon the tablets was clearly stated in two paragraphs from the correspondence, one largely relating to the committee's difficulties in dealing with Mrs. Sharp. He said:

If we were to continue this search for a year, we would find someone claiming that there was an error in it. Governor Carpenter and I have concluded that we will take the responsibility of leaving this part of the plan as you originally made it and as Mr. Palmer gave it to you. The only thing that I have any fear of in this matter is that we will leave out some name that ought to be in. I would rather put in a half dozen

names that ought to be out than to leave one out that ought to be in; because no one has any right to complain if his name is in the list and it does not belong there, in the same sense of one who should have his name there and it had been left out would have right to complain.

I have read Mrs. Sharp's letter. I know of no way to do but to do as we think would be right. Mrs. Sharp was thoroughly satisfied when we arranged where her dead should be buried, when we were up there. Now, she has entirely changed on that subject. I think we would receive as much criticism if we did not put these names on in alphabetical order, if we changed them to suit Mrs. Sharp. We have located the monument to suit her. We agreed upon the place where we would put her dead and it seems to me she intends to find fault with everything we do. If she wants to do the whole business, as far as I am concerned I am willing to resign and let her do it.

The letter of Mrs. Abbie Gardner Sharp to Mr. Aldrich follows:

PIONEER MONUMENT AND GARDNER CABIN

Home of the Sole Survivor of the Massacre of 1857.

Okoboji, Iowa, Oct. 4, 1901

Hon Chas. Aldrich, Des Moines, Iowa

In reply to your inquiry as to how it came that the name of W. V. Lucas found its way on the monument, I beg leave to inform you that I was told by a man whose word I could not question that Mr. Lucas fell in with Spirit Lake expedition on the march to the scenes of the dead. This information came to me after the inscription was already prepared and I furnished the name in good faith believing that by right this name should be added with the others who endeavored to do what they could for suffering humanity.

I am very sorry that this error, if an error it may be called, should have occurred in this way. But the most deplorable mistake of all was the omission of two names, Willie Thomas and Levi How, which belong among the names of the dead. If you remember, I sent you a carefully prepared list of all the names which I took from my "History of the Spirit Lake Massacre," with the request that when you had prepared the inscription that the names be returned to me for comparison with the original before it was sent to Mr. Peterson. For some reason this request was not granted and the result was a great disappointment to the friends of the dead as well as to those who are familiar with the history of the massacre.

My experience in proof reading history taught me the need of comparing over and over again every word, even then

errors would be overlooked sometimes. It has always been a source of disappointment that these two names were left out, so I got Mr. Peters to furnish the letters for these names, but they have never been put on the tablet. Now, I would suggest that proper steps be taken to erase the name of Mr. Lucas and attach the letters on the tablet of Willie Thomas and Levi How.

I understand that the affair has caused Mr. Lucas much embarrassment, for which I am more sorry than words can express.

Yours respt. MRS. A. G. SHARP

Price Increases Explained

The phenomena of price raising has ever puzzled those who are purchasers of commodities. In recent years so many hardships have resulted that retailers are perplexed to find satisfactory explanations in answering the numerous queries upon the subject. Few are as resourceful as a former member of the Iowa senate.

Sen. James A. Smith, of Osage, was an extensive dealer in lumber, owning many lumber yards in northern Iowa, southern Minnesota and over in South Dakota. The occupation and dealings had been life-long and profitable. Often referring to appropriate phases of his own business in legislative discussions, he stood a considerable amount of ribbing and occasionally was characterized by fellow legislators as the "king of the lumber industry." He took this in good nature, sometimes replying seriously to questions asked.

One day in debate Senator Smith mentioned the increase in cost of maintaining state institutions. A questioning fellow senator asked if a rise in the current price of lumber might be a contributing factor. Smith quickly rejoined that the suggestion was entirely too broad, as that was a business where prices are not arbitrarily raised—only equalized between rough and finished stock, as well as various grades and lengths handled. When the senate uproar had subsided no further questions were asked or reference to that phase of the subject mentioned.

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